

Division(s):

AUDIT & GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE

20 NOVEMBER 2013

REVIEW OF THE COUNTY COUNCIL'S DECISION MAKING GOVERNANCE ARRANGEMENTS

1. On 2 April the County Council agreed new governance arrangements for the political decision making of the Council. In so doing, the Council determined that the Monitoring Officer should undertake a review of these arrangements twelve months after their coming into operation.
2. The Audit and Governance Committee has responsibilities for the oversight of governance and constitutional matters. Therefore this report advises the Committee of the Monitoring Officer's proposed timetable for reviewing the governance arrangements; outlines the intention to provide a report to this Committee in due course; and asks the Committee to consider appointing three members of it to act as an informal sounding board for the Monitoring Officer, as required, during the progress of his review.

Background

3. The new governance arrangements, which came into effect after the May 2013 elections, sought more fully to engage all members, to slim down bureaucracy and simultaneously to create a flexible and focused form of governance on the business of the Council. This involved reducing the number of scrutiny committees from six to three – Performance, Education and Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny – providing a keener focus.
4. In addition, Council approved the concept of Cabinet Advisory Groups to strengthen and support the Cabinet in policy development. A standing advisory group was created in the form of the Transport Advisory Panel. The remit of the Audit and Governance Committee was also changed to take on the majority of the responsibilities of the former Standards Committee and the Democracy & Organisation Committee, which was ended.
5. At the local level, Council recognised the importance of engaging members in their localities and therefore created nine Locality Meetings with a view to maximising the perspectives of local members and to integrate these into the direction of the Council.

6. In April, the Council also endorsed the creation of a statutory body, the Health and Wellbeing Board, which had existed in shadow form for a year previously.

Basis for a review

7. In changing its governance arrangements, Council wished to ensure that the new arrangements actually achieved the twin aims of engaging members more fully and providing a more focused, integrated approach to policy and performance.
8. Council envisaged that the arrangements should be in place for twelve months before undertaking a review. The arrangements came into effect after the May 2013 elections and therefore a decision on a review is probably best taken to September 2014 meeting of Council. However, to enable an informed decision, it would be appropriate for key considerations to begin a little earlier than that, in early Spring.

Outline and timeline for the review

9. The Monitoring Officer will lead the review which will run, effectively, from February to July 2014 and will commence once the budget round has been concluded. The review will involve seeking the views of members generally in respect of their experience of the new governance arrangements. The review will consider the extent to which:
 - a. members consider themselves to be more fully engaged
 - b. the arrangements are contributing to the effective delivery of policy and performance
 - c. the arrangements provide a sound and accountable form of governance
 - d. whether any changes should be made and what these should be
10. It is intended that a progress report would be given to this Committee in mid-April 2014 with a final report on 2 July (following consideration by the Performance Scrutiny Committee on 26 June and prior to Cabinet meeting on 15 July to finalise recommendations to Council on 9 September).
11. Group leaders have endorsed this approach.

Sounding board

12. The Committee is asked to consider nominating three councillors to act as an informal sounding board to assist the Monitoring Officer in the conduct of his review. This would involve receiving periodic updates and queries from the Monitoring Officer on any issues or governance considerations arising from the review on which he would value some member views. This would be helpful both in terms of providing a useful member sounding board for the Monitoring Officer and also in assisting discussion at this Committee when the Monitoring Officer presents his interim and final reports.

RECOMMENDATION

13. The Committee is RECOMMENDED to:

- (a) Note the Monitoring Officer's proposed review of governance arrangements and the Committee's role in receiving interim and final reports;**
- (b) Nominate three councillors from the Committee to act as an informal sounding board for the Monitoring Officer during the conduct of the review.**

PETER CLARK
County Solicitor and Monitoring Officer

Contact officer: Glenn Watson
Contact number: Tel: 01865 815270
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